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FRED COOPER/NEW YORK

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ETHNIC RUSSIAN IDENTITY CRISIS?  
(VOICED PIECE AND INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

SCHOLARS FROM ACROSS THE UNITED STATES RECENTLY GATHERED AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK TO ATTEND A TWO-DAY CONFERENCE ON THE STATUS OF THE RUSSIAN ETHNIC GROUPS IN THE SOVIET UNION TODAY. FROM NEW YORK, VOA'S FRED COOPER HAS A REPORT.

VOICE:

"FOR THE FIRST TIME, BOTH IN THE WEST AND IN THE SOVIET UNION, THERE IS REAL CONCERN OVER THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE RUSSIAN ETHNIC GROUP IS LOSING ITS CHARACTER AND IDENTITY." THAT WAS THE PROPOSITION THAT BROUGHT FORTY SCHOLARS TO COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY FOR A CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY COLUMBIA'S PROGRAM ON SOVIET NATIONALITY PROBLEMS AND RUSSIAN INSTITUTE.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR EDWARD ALLWORTH ORGANIZED THE GATHERING, WHICH WAS PART OF A SERIES OF DISCUSSIONS ON SOVIET NATIONALITY ISSUES. HE SAID THAT WHILE THE RUSSIANS ARE STILL THE LARGEST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL ETHNIC GROUP IN THE SOVIET UNION, THERE ARE SERIOUS QUESTIONS ABOUT WHETHER THE GROUP IS SLOWLY DISINTEGRATING:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- ALLWORTH

"THE SAMIZDAT WRITERS AND OTHER WRITERS HAVE SPOKEN IN TERMS OF IMPENDING IRREPARABLE LOSS TO RUSSIAN IDENTITY FROM THE LOSS OF THE OLD RURAL ROOTS, THE LOSS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE, THE MODERNIZATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE -- TO THE EXTENT THAT THEY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN TAPE RECORDERS THAN THEY ARE IN ICONS AND ALL OF THE ARTIFACTS OF THE PAST. I THINK THERE'S A REAL CONCERN AMONG RUSSIAN THINKING PEOPLE -- AND I DON'T MEAN ONLY PROFESSIONAL INTELLECTUALS -- THAT RUSSIA, AS SUCH, IS CHANGING A GREAT DEAL."

VOICE:

PROFESSOR ALLWORTH SAID THAT DURING THE TWO-DAY CONFERENCE, THREE POINTS OF VIEW PREDOMINATED: THAT OF AMERICAN SOCIAL

SCIENTISTS -- WHO DOUBTED THERE WILL BE A LOSS OF RUSSIAN DOMINANCE; THAT OF OTHER AMERICAN SCHOLARS IN THE HUMANITIES AND OF RUSSIAN EMIGRANTS -- BOTH OF WHOM DID SEE A PROBLEM; AND THE OFFICIAL SOVIET POINT OF VIEW -- WHICH PROFESSOR ALLWORTH SAID WAS ONE OF REALLY NOT DISCUSSING THE ISSUE AT ALL.

ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR ALLWORTH, THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND THE DEMOGRAPHERS AT THE CONFERENCE -- WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS -- FELT THERE WAS ACTUALLY LITTLE TO TALK ABOUT:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- ALLWORTH

"WHAT THEY SAW IN TERMS OF POWER STRUCTURE AND RUSSIANS IN HIGH PLACES, IN NUMBERS OF RUSSIANS AND SO ON, DIDN'T GIVE THEM ANY FEELING THAT WE CAN TALK, AT LEAST IN THE MECHANICAL SENSE, ABOUT A POSSIBILITY THAT THE RUSSIANS WILL LOSE THE KIND OF DOMINANCE WHICH THEY HAVE ENJOYED SO FAR."

VOICE:

HOWEVER, DOCTOR ALLWORTH CONTINUED THE HUMANISTS -- PROFESSORS OF LITERATURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION -- AND RECENT SOVIET EMIGRANTS, POINTED TO MORE SUBTLE INDICATORS OF THE CONDITION OF THE RUSSIAN ETHNIC GROUP. THEY CITED LANGUAGE AS ONE EXAMPLE:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- ALLWORTH

"WHAT'S HAPPENING TO THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IS EVIDENTLY A TREMENDOUS KIND OF STANDARDIZATION DOWNWARD OF THE LITERARY LANGUAGE ON THE BASIS OF A KIND OF BUREAUCRATIC AND JOURNALISTIC RUSSIAN WHICH IS IN VERY LITTLE SENSE CLOSELY RELATED TO THE GREAT RUSSIAN LITERARY LANGUAGE THAT WE ALL KNOW ABOUT FROM THE PAST.

THIS WAS A STRIKING OBSERVATION AND THE QUESTION RAISED BY IT WAS: 'WELL, SO WHAT DOES RUSSIA BECOME THEN IF RUSSIAN LANGUAGE HAS, IN A SENSE (BEEN DOWNGRADED)'" THE ANSWER TO THAT IS NOT CLEAR BUT IT IS CLEAR THAT RUSSIA BECOMES DIFFERENT AS A RESULT OF IT."

VOICE:

AS TO THE OFFICIAL SOVIET VIEW, PROFESSOR ALLWORTH DISMISSED IT AS COMPOSED MAINLY OF CLICHES:

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- ALLWORTH

"WHY? BECAUSE THIS IS NOT A SUBJECT THAT IS DISCUSSED OPENLY IN THE USSR. YOU DON'T HAVE A COLLOQUIUM ABOUT 'IS ETHNIC RUSSIA UNDERGOING AN IDENTITY CRISIS TODAY?' OBVIOUSLY YOU DON'T TALK ABOUT A SUBJECT LIKE THAT."

VOICE:

PROFESSOR ALLWORTH SAID THE REASON IS THAT SOVIET AUTHORITIES DO NOT DARE TO ENTERTAIN THE POSSIBILITY THAT THEIR MOST NUMEROUS AND DOMINANT ETHNIC GROUP -- WHAT HE CALLED "THE CORE OF THE SOVIET UNION" -- MIGHT IN SOME WAY BE LOSING ITS GRIP.

THERE WAS ONE SURPRISE AT THE COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE, ACCORDING TO PROFESSOR ALLWORTH. THE WIDELY HELD NOTION THAT THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX RELIGION NO LONGER EXERTS A STRONG INFLUENCE AMONG RUSSIANS WAS DISPUTED BY SOME OF THE EXPERTS AT THE CONFERENCE. ONE AUTHORITY CITED THE FIGURE OF THIRTY TO FIFTY MILLION BELIEVERS IN THE SOVIET UNION TODAY -- A TREMENDOUS BASE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF RUSSIAN ETHNIC IDENTITY.

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JS/RTD